

# Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

Official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, featuring articles and reminiscences of the people and places in the Ypsilanti area



SPRING 2014

## THE PARENTS OF DEPOT TOWN Mark & Roccena Vail Norris

BY JANICE ANSCHUETZ

Mark Norris is considered by many Ypsilanti historians as the father of Depot Town. If that is so, then his wife Roccena is the mother, and together they are the parents. In this article I hope to tell the story of how they combined to do so much to influence the enterprise, activity and fabric of not only Depot Town but also of River Street. Together, but in their separate ways, they helped to build a sturdy foundation for a successful town in which businesses could thrive and families could prosper. Many of his contemporaries would agree that Mark Norris was an enterprising, energetic man who probably founded more businesses and did more to improve

the daily life of Ypsilantians than any other man in Washtenaw County in the mid 1800s. Roccena, his wife, spent tireless hours helping to shape the moral character of the community by encouraging religion, education, literacy, and helping the poor of the community.

Mark Norris was one of 14 children born in a town which later became known as Peacham, Vermont, on February 16, 1796. He was educated there and once taught at Lima Seminary. Mark learned the trade of land surveyor and left home to move to Covington, New York, sometime before 1819, where he opened a business running a country store. He also

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The Norris home that was built on River Street near the Huron River in c1833.

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# From the PRESIDENT'S DESK

BY ALVIN E. RUDISILL

I just returned from two months in Florida and was amazed to see the high piles of snow around the sidewalks and parking lot at the Museum. I can't remember ever seeing this much snow on the ground in Ypsilanti in March. Thanks to all those who kept the sidewalks and parking lot clear throughout the winter months.

We will certainly miss the friendship and significant volunteer contributions that Kathryn Howard made to the Society over the years. Her expertise and the thousands of hours she devoted to the Museum over the years made our Museum one of the best house museums in the entire country.

Our main priority this year will be to plan and carry out several fundraising campaigns to "Retire the Mortgage." The Society purchased the buildings and property at 220 North Huron Street from the City of Ypsilanti for \$250,000 back in 2006. A down payment of \$125,000 was paid at that time and an agreement was signed to pay the balance of \$125,000 in ten years with no interest charged by the City. At the present time we have raised approximately \$91,000 and we still need to raise \$34,000 so this final payment can be made. One of the first activities planned is to sell personalized bricks that will be placed in the front yard of the Museum. Other activities being considered include sending general fundraising letters to YHS members and Ypsilanti businesses and service clubs, yard sales in the Normal Park and College Heights areas, silent auctions at our quarterly meetings, restaurant sponsor days where YHS would receive 10% of gross sales, antique evaluation by an antique specialist and, as a last resort, the sale of certain collections owned by YHS that have no connection to Ypsilanti.

If you are not currently on our email listserv please call the Museum at 734-482-4990 and have your name added. We are using the listserv only for program notifications and your email address will not be shared with others. Also, please check the Event Schedule on our web site for upcoming special programs and displays.

We are looking for volunteers to serve as docents for the Museum or research assistants for the Archives. Both the Museum and Archives are open from 2:00 to 5:00 pm Tuesday through Sunday. If you are available during that time and are interested in helping us preserve the historical information and artifacts of the area, or in educating the general public about our history, please give me a call at 734-476-6658.



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The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a museum of local history which is presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Fletcher-White Archives are organized and operated by the Ypsilanti Historical Society. We are all volunteers and our membership is open to everyone, including non-city residents.

**For information about upcoming Society events, visit us online**

[www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org](http://www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org)

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built and ran an ashery where potash and pearlsh were made. He was appointed postmaster in 1824.

There, Mark's life changed forever when he fell in love with the spirited Roccena Vail. She had been born in Delaware County, New York, in 1798, the oldest daughter of James and Helena Compton Vail. Education was valued in their household and Roccena was taught to read at an early age by her favorite uncle. She grew up surrounded by the books that she loved, as her father founded the town library. Her teacher also lived with the Vail family. According to Roccena's granddaughter, Maria Norris, the Vail family lived on the banks of the Delaware River and the young girl rowed a canoe across the river to school.

Roccena's father's sudden death, when she was only 15 years of age, quickly changed the life of her family. Roccena and her aunt traveled together to the wilderness of Pike, New York, to find land that her widowed mother could afford. Indians still lived in this area and the curious young girl would visit with them in their nearby wigwams. Roccena's family soon joined her and her aunt, and a log cabin was built for them to live in. Roccena found a job as a teacher. Her small salary provided much of the support of her family. Food was scarce and Roccena's heart went out to the starving Indians and poor people in the community. Because she was sometimes paid in peas and new potatoes, her family had enough food and they shared what provisions they had with the less fortunate.

Mark and Roccena met at a church in Covington, New York, which was the town she taught in seven miles from her own family home in Moscow, New York. They married in her mother's log cabin during a fierce two-day snow storm in January, 1820, and moved to their own log cabin. Mark and Roccena invited her mother and the rest of her family to join them



Roccena Norris, along with her husband Mark, might be considered "The Parents of Depot Town."

three months later, adding two rooms onto their house to accommodate them. Mark's businesses did well and they were soon able to move from their log cabin to a substantial frame home, which their granddaughter Maria described as a "modest mansion." The family had grown by then and Mark and Roccena were blessed with two children, Elvira and Lyman Decatur.

Mark Norris was a Mason and at that time there was a great deal of anti-Mason sentiment in New York, which seems to be the family's primary reason for seeking a more tolerant and free environment in a new territory. He first traveled to what is now Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1827, and we can read about his journey in pages from his diary:

*July 9, 1827 – Left Buffalo on steamer Marie Antoinette, Captain Whittaker, for Detroit, which was reached July 16, only a seven days' passage.*

*July 18 – After waiting a day for the stage, I started on foot for the interior. Walked as far as Springwells, when I took a due west course of about six miles. Crossed the Rouge, a sluggish, dark muddy stream,*

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with plenty of rich land on either side, and rich in fever and ague too, I should judge. Traveled about 24 miles. Stopped all night at Andrew's Tavern on Togus Plains.

**Ypsilanti, Friday, 28** – Have spent most of the day in viewing the village. Nature and art have combined to make it a place of business. It is situated on the Huron, nine miles below Ann Arbor, and four miles above the landing, where boats of twenty-tons burden arrive from the lake to unload. Land is already valued very high.

**Saturday 29** – To-day bought two village lots (half an acre) for which I paid \$100 and returned again to Ann Arbor.

**Sunday, 30** – Spent most of this forenoon in searching for a man lost in the woods, and supposed to be dead. Made no discovery. There is no church and no preaching here to-day. It seems to be a place for lounging and gossip. In the afternoon attended a wedding and saw Mr. Higby united in "hymen's gentle bonds" to Miss Ann Gorham.

**Monday, July 31** – Went with Dr. W. to Saline. Fine good land but somewhat broken and I believe sickly. Returned by way of Ypsilanti, a fine country of land between the Saline and Huron.

**Tuesday, Ypsilanti** – This day I have been viewing the lands in the vicinity of this village. Concluded to purchase within a short distance of the village. The lands on the Chicago road, now being built from Detroit west, and mostly taken up by speculators, and also on the river.

**Aug. 5** – Staid in this village last night. This morning took a deed for the farm purchase yesterday and returned to Ann Arbor.

**Aug. 6** – Left Washtenaw for Detroit. Traveled to the Rouge within six miles of Detroit. Retired to bed very much fatigued, but the mosquitoes would not let me sleep. They attacked on larboard and starboard, and raked me from "stem to stern." I fought them until my patience, if not my ammunition, was exhausted, when I arose and prepared for flight. Started about 12 o'clock for Detroit. The first three miles met with no incident worth mentioning, after which I was assailed by an army of dogs at every house. Arriving at Detroit I went to the inn, where after receiving a long lecture from the landlord for being out at that time of night, I was permitted to go to bed again, and slept until a late hour the following morning. Men, who are not pioneers are allowed in hotels now minus a landlord's lecture.

Surprisingly, after all he had endured on his first venture to what is now Ypsilanti, Mark returned to Covington, disposed of his business, store, and home and began the return journey with his two young children and wife the next year, 1828. In 1874, son Lyman spoke at Ypsilanti's Semi-Centennial and told about his family's trip to Michigan. It was not an easy one either physically or emotionally for the small family. In *The Story of Ypsilanti*, written by Harvey C. Colburn, published in 1923, Colburn summarizes Lyman's speech.

In their company was a Mrs. Curtis who was on her way to visit a son in Superior Township. The Norrises arrived from Detroit by way of Plymouth and Dixboro. In the city they had secured a horse and a two-wheeled gig. Anson Brown with a one-horse wagon travelled with them, taking the children with him in the wagon while the ladies rode in the gig and Norris walked. The road was all but bottomless and it was after thirty-eight hours that they arrived in Dixboro, having stopped one night at a wayside tavern. In Dixboro they remained over night with a family by the name of Martin, then having parted from Brown, followed the road to Ypsilanti, the children riding in the gig.

As they reached the bluff where now is Highland Cemetery, Norris cried "There's Ypsilanti." Half a mile distant, they saw a wreath of smoky vapor rising from the bushes and caught a glimpse of the unfinished frame structure which was to be Perry's Tavern. Mrs. Norris leaned her head against a stump, wearied and lonesome, and burst into tears. Then, Norris being urged to go forward and procure some manner of lodgings, the mother and two little ones slowly followed. Arriving at the bank of the Huron, they found a narrow foot-bridge, newly erected, spanning a clear, swift stream. The opposite bank up which the road climbed was very steep and at its summit stood the tavern then kept by Judge Oliver Whitmore.

It seems that the young family soon set about to become positive members of the sparsely settled town. Their first year was spent at the rear of the Ely home, which was situated on the southeast corner of the Chicago Road (now Michigan Avenue) and Washington Street. Their granddaughter Maria Norris described the modest living quarters as consisting of two rooms and a pantry on the ground floor, a store operated by Mr. Arden Ballard in front, and two rooms above. This did not stop Roccena from using one of the rooms as a school for the pioneer children in the vicinity. There was no church at the time, so she assisted in organizing the first Sunday School in a log building on the Chicago Road for people of any denomination. Circuit riders were always welcome guests at her home, which later housed many visiting ministers.

By the next year, 1829, Norris built the first frame home on the east side of the river. Some believe that it was in the area of 501 North River Street. The same year, he opened



a dry goods store made of logs with huge cracks in the rough wood floor. This was situated east of the Chicago Road Bridge, on the south side of the street. It was not an easy matter to equip his store. He purchased goods from New York which were then shipped to Buffalo on the Hudson River, then through the Erie Canal, where they were transferred to a boat which stopped in Detroit. Word was spread to Norris that the boat with his order was about to land in Detroit, so he had to quickly secure seven, two and four horse teams and urge them through the heavy mud on the road towards Detroit. There was no vessel in Detroit when he arrived, so he rented a row boat, rowed down the river, found the boat with his goods on it, and finally rowed back to Detroit to await its arrival. From there, the wagons were loaded and 31 days from the time that they left New York, his shelves were packed with products for sale. Building and equipping a store and a new home in one year was not enough for Mark. He was appointed postmaster and eventually served two terms under President Andrew Jackson. He knew that the wealth of this new community was to be connected to the water power that it offered, and soon set about harnessing and selling that water power of the river by building substantial dams to replace the primitive ones that resembled beaver dams. Mark rented out the water power from at least one of the dams, and he also imported carding machinery to open a woolen mill to process wool and create cloth. During the next twenty years, he would become a partner in a number of mills on the Huron River including the woolen mill, a saw mill, and several flour mills.

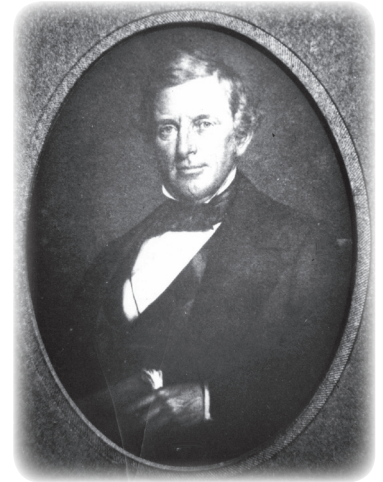
Mark was also concerned about the moral climate of his new community. In 1829, he became one of the founding members of the Temperance Society – devoted to eliminating alcohol in this rough pioneer community where drunken men and woman were often involved in brawls and lawless activities.

He became a partner in two distinct businesses designed to make Ypsilanti a center of trade and which would allow raw and trade goods to be brought into the town and also shipped out of it. In 1831, he purchased stock and became director of an ambitious railroad line called The Detroit – St. Joseph Railroad Company which was to run between Detroit and Chicago. However, after making little advancement, this company was bought out by the Michigan Central Railroad six years later.

In 1833, Mark became involved in another imaginative but failed venture with other citizens in Ypsilanti. He was a shareholder in a large boat designed to navigate the Huron River and bring goods into and out of town. Unfortunately the “Enterprise” as the boat was optimistically named, was soon wrecked and Mark’s investment lost.

As testimony to his financial success with his store and mills, around 1833 Mark built a large brick home for Rocce-

na and his children. The family left their frame structure and moved south on River Street to a beautiful, large home on the Huron River, the same river which had contributed to Mark’s wealth as a mill builder and owner. Roccena was able to again enjoy living on a river as she had as a young girl in New York. She quickly made the house into a home, planted gardens, furnished rooms, and began entertaining both local citizens and travelers. The Norris home was referred to as “The Minister’s Hotel” because of the number of clergymen and their families who stayed with them. Her beloved mother moved from New York and lived with the family in their large home.



Mark Norris is considered by many Ypsilanti historians as the father of Depot Town.

Norris continued to purchase and sell land, especially on the east side of Ypsilanti. Between 1834 and 1852, sometimes working with partners, he accumulated a great amount of land on the east side as additions to the city including what is now the area bounded by River, Prospect, Forest and Cross Streets.

Believing that the growing town needed a source of capital to invest in new business ventures, Mark joined with other leading citizens of Ypsilanti to charter the Bank of Ypsilanti in 1836. The bank operated for three years before going bankrupt. Norris has been honored by both friends and historians as paying off all debts even though the amount of money owed far outweighed his income.

By 1838, Mark Norris owned and operated the flour mill in Depot Town and helped influence the building of a train station in the area of Cross and River Street, thus founding Depot Town. He built a large brick structure, The Grand Western hotel and tavern, on a triangular piece of ground just west of the Michigan Central train station. The magnificent building opened in 1839 with stores on the ground floor and the hotel above.

During this time, Mark’s wife Roccena continued to earn a place in the heart of the community as well. She made sure that her two children were well educated by sending them both out of town to complete their education. (More will be written about Elvira and Lyman in another episode of “The River Street Saga”). When the state of Michigan was investigating a town in which to build a college for teachers, Roccena and Mark donated \$1000 to the fund

collected by the generous people of Ypsilanti to ensure that the college would be built in Ypsilanti. When the college opened, their daughter, Elviria, was among the first students.

In 1838, Roccena helped form a library association in town, as her father had done in New York. She was a founding member and president of the Ladies' Home Association, which served the needs of the poor and the unfortunate in Ypsilanti, providing to their needs with dignity and generosity.

In 1839, Norris was one of the founding members of a secret society called The Vigilance Committee. Its purpose was to try and curb illegal and dangerous activity in the community. The group met on a regular basis in secret locations to try to stop crime and protect the citizens of Ypsilanti.

With all of his enterprise and interests, Mark Norris was noted for being an indulgent father and a caring husband. One example, in 1838, occurred when his wife and daughter Elvira returned from a visit back East, they found a new carriage waiting for them at the depot, and when they arrived home were surprised by a beautiful pianoforte in their parlor. He loved what he called his "Old House by the River."

Many of his letters to family, friends, and business associates are tenderly saved and available at both the Bentley Library of the University of Michigan and the Ypsilanti Historical Society archives. In one, he offers advice to a somewhat homesick daughter who has married and moved to New York. In the letter dated November 10, 1841, he writes "Now, Elvira... you (now) live in Alexander, don't you (?) Well, now, you must not say one word against the town or its inhabitants. Speak well of the town and its inhabitants. If all would try to find some good quality in everyone they meet or see and would, if it became necessary to speak of them at all, speak of those good qualities...how much better it would be."

Both Mark and his wife were involved in the Presbyterian Church in Ypsilanti, which by 1856 was in need of a new facility. Mark Norris took the lead, as a trustee, and not only served on the board to oversee the construction of a beautiful new structure, but the Norris family contributed \$1,000, which was a sizable amount of money at the time. Like her husband, Roccena was interested in the world around her. In the sermon given at her funeral, she was described by Reverend Tenall as "...blessed with a wonderful memory. This connected with her wide range of general reading made her one of the most entertaining of friends. She seemed to know something of almost everything – perhaps no subject could be started in conversation concerning which she could not furnish some scrap of literature, and she was always learning, always reading... Her desire for knowledge and her interest in educated per-

sons was unabated to the end of life." Roccena was an advocate of woman's rights and a noted reader and writer of letters. Indeed, many of her letters and papers are in the Norris Family Collection at The Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, including correspondence with early feminists such as Caroline Kirkland and Electa Stewart.



Mark Norris died in 1862, at the age of 66, in his beautiful home on River Street.

About the year 1860, The Michigan Central Railroad needed the land that the Norris hotel was built upon to expand. Mark used his skills and imagination to deal with this challenge. He arranged for the bricks from the hotel to be moved across the street from the northwest corner of Cross and River Street to the northeast corner. There he constructed the magnificent and imposing Norris Block which opened in 1861. It was bought by O.E. Thompson in 1869, who painted his family name across it and has since been known as "The Thompson Block." Few remember now that for the first eight years, this imposing three-story structure was called "The Norris Block."

Mark Norris had time to prepare for his death at the age of 66 in 1862. Because of his father's failing health, Lyman moved back to Ypsilanti in about 1854 and along with Mark's son-in-law, Benjamin Follett, took over the business enterprises with which his energetic father was involved. Mark Norris died at his beautiful home on River Street, a block from Depot Town, in an area that he not only lived in, but founded. He left behind a grieving family with two married children and nine grandchildren of which more will be written about in the next article in "The River Street Saga." Eight of his fourteen siblings were still alive when he died. His wife, Roccena, continued to live in her beautiful home, very actively involved with her family, church, and community to the very end of her life. She was surrounded by her entire family when she died at the age of 79 in 1876. Both now rest together in eternal peace on River Street at Highland Cemetery, sharing the same view that they first had upon arriving in Ypsilanti as a young couple.

*(Janice Anschuetz is a long time member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



## The River Street Saga – Norris Family

*(Author's note: I fell in love with River Street on my first trip to Ypsilanti as a 21 year old in 1964 when we visited the area to find a place to live. My husband had just signed a contract to teach English at Eastern Michigan University and we were living near Wayne State University in the inner city of Detroit. We drove down Michigan Avenue, and when we realized we were in the town of Ypsilanti, by chance, we turned right onto River Street, and that was the moment when we knew that River Street was where we wanted to live. We passed beautiful Victorian mansions, smaller Greek revival homes, 1920's bungalows and small cottages. We glanced at Depot Town, saw the train station (where trains still stopped several times a day), passed the Hutchinson House high on a hill, drove by the Swaine house on the corner of Forest Avenue, and marveled at the vegetable and flower gardens. We saw a chicken or two and even a goat in the large yards as we approached Highland Cemetery. We gazed at the hills, the vistas, and the woods that surrounded us. We had seen enough. Turning the car around in search of a real estate office, we met a realtor and told her that we wanted to live on River Street. "No you don't honey," she drawled. "You can't." We assumed that she was telling us that homes*

*on that amazing street were out of our very limited budget. We followed her car down River Street again and turned right on Clark Road and within two hours we had signed a purchase agreement on an FHA repossessed house with a large park behind its backyard with woods beyond.*

*However, River Street was still calling to us. Five years later when we bought the beautiful, but needy, Swaine House at the corner of East Forest and North River, I finally understood the realtor's statement. The reason she said that we couldn't buy a home on River Street was because the area was redlined and it was nearly impossible to either get a mortgage or insurance for a home on River Street. The zoning made it a haven for slum landlords buying on land contract. As the saying goes, "where there is a will there is a way." With four children under the age of five and another on the way, we followed our hearts to live happily ever after (most of the time) in our River Street home.*

*I think that I needed River Street and perhaps River Street needed me. I used what I had learned from my Master's Degree in Social Work in Community Organization from the University of Michigan, and joined with other long-term residents and new neighbors who*

*were also in love with our area. We worked together to change the zoning, clean up blight, fight the slum landlords and drug dealers, restore our homes, and place our beautiful neighborhood on the local, state and national historic registries. More importantly, we all helped to make this part of our city a desirable place to live.*

*River Street and the ghosts of River Street still call me. I have researched and written articles for the Gleanings about many River Street residents such as the Peck family, the George and Swaine families, the Hutchinson family, and even Walter Briggs, who was born on River Street. In this series, which I will call The River Street Saga, I am researching and writing about even more people who have made their homes on River Street. It should be noted that there are many more community leaders whom I have written about who rest for eternity at beautiful Highland Cemetery on River Street. These include Frederick Pease, Walter Hewitt, Samuel Post, and their families. I hope that you will enjoy reading The River Street Saga as much as I have enjoyed researching and writing it. River Street and the people that have lived there are calling me to tell their story.)*

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# Early Physical Education in Ypsilanti Schools

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

*(The following article was provided by Claudia Wasik who enjoyed a long career at EMU, as a student, professor and coach during her 32-year affiliation with the university. Claudia found the article which appears to have been written in the 1940s or 1950s.)*

While the city of Ypsilanti was in its early growing stages, physical culture or physical training was also in its infancy. The term "physical education" is relatively new. It was not until 1927 that legal sanction was given to it. Prior to this time, "physical culture" was in vogue. Traditionally physical education has been of interest to state and local educators. As early as 1847 Superintendent of Public Instruction, O. C. Comstock, stated that among other attainments "the teacher should know something of physical education, sound health and a development of all physical faculties and a system of popular education." During the 1850's, reference to the desirability of physical education was noted at the dedication of the Normal School here in Ypsilanti. The main speaker, Rev. John Pierce and A. S. Welch in his inaugural address as principal, advocated physical culture for students. When attempting to recapture physical education's past in Ypsilanti, one finds that he must look in two



The exterior of the gymnasium was of brick with trimmings of Berea stone and its architecture was medieval in style. The building was divided into a south half for men and a north half for women.



In 1894 a new gymnasium was erected by Michigan State Normal College on the block enclosed by Cross, Normal, Summit, and Ellis streets. The building served the college and community for 71 years.

directions; to the university and to the public schools. This is necessary because in most instances it was the graduates of Michigan State Normal College that were to be the teachers of physical training in Ypsilanti schools.

In 1860, Principal Welch requested \$1,000 for a building of physical culture. Although the State Legislature denied the requests on two occasions, the State Board of Education, aware of the need, saved a small amount of money of its yearly appropriations and that, along with private contributions, was enough to erect a wooded gymnasium in 1862 for \$1,200. Although no special teacher of physical culture was available, formal instruction in calisthenics and light gymnastics were provided by interested faculty members. This building served the students and faculty for only 10 years when it was destroyed by fire. For the next 20 years informal instruction was provided in the large classrooms or hallways of the school.

In 1894, a new gymnasium was erected on the block enclosed by Cross, Normal, Summit, and Ellis streets. Public spirited citizens raised \$1,800 which was matched by

the state so that this site could be purchased. Since this building was to serve the community and Eastern Michigan for 71 years, many Ypsilanti residents may still remember it.

The exterior was of brick with trimmings of Berea stone and its architecture was medieval in style. The building was divided into a south half for men and north side for women. Each side contained showers, lockers, a swimming pool (13 x 22) and a running track. Equipment such as climbing poles, adjustable ladders, pulleys, vaulting boxes, stall bars, Indian clubs and horses were located throughout. The addition, the west gym, built in 1914, was intended for men only.

With the completion of the new gymnasium in 1894, a department of physical training was formally established. Professor Wilbur Bowen was appointed director and Fannie Cheever Burton, assistant. Two years were required to complete the course of study which included special subjects in applied anatomy, methods in physical training, German and Swedish gymnastics and practice teaching. In 1921 a four year program for specialized students was first offered. Young ladies enrolled in the physical training program of the 1920's could be found wearing black stockings, black pleated bloomers, middy blous-



es with a sailor's tie and square knot. Young men in physical training programs wore white t-shirts and long green trousers with a white stripe.

Activity classes could include performing the "Swedish Days Order" which was a progressive set of activities that systematically exercised all body parts. Indian clubs, dumb bells and wands were sometimes used. Apparatus work included rings, Swedish box, parallel bars, horse and mats. Other classes were devoted to posture correction, precision marching, aesthetic dancing (a forerunner of modern dance) clog and folk dancing, and sports.

During the 1920's a circus sponsored by the Michigan State Normal College physical education club was started. All students enrolled in physical education activity classes took part in the affair held in the West gymnasium.



Activity classes at the Normal College could include performing the "Swedish Days Order" which was a progressive set of activities that systematically exercised all body parts. Indian clubs, dumb bells and wands were sometimes used.

Many townspeople may remember several circuses, each with their grand parade, animal acts, gymnastic demonstrations, swinging ladders, and clog dancing; others recall the excitement of the human cannonball act with identical twins, Dr. Old's gilded figures depicting famous statuary, Bingo Brown as ring master, the acrobatic feats of Jack Flag and Gus Zelke, and the Zouave drill.

May-Day-On-The-Green was another traditional event sponsored by the physical education department. Women enrolled in physical education classes participated in the program which has as its general theme, "The Awakening of Spring." The memory of this Spring pageant and the winding of the May Pole is still shared by many and some Michigan State Normal College graduates in the Ypsilanti area continue to remember

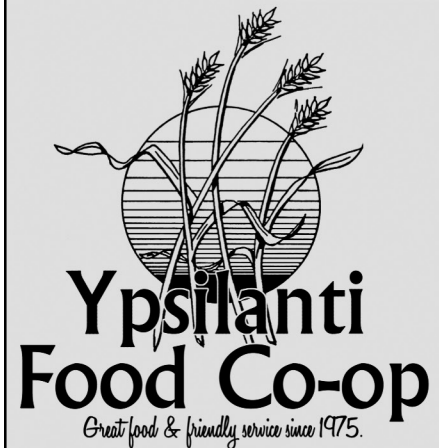
their particular role in the program; as snow maidens, Spanish and Irish dancers, or even as Queen of the May.

In 1919 the Physical Training Law of 1911 was revised, which made it mandatory that all students in public schools and normal colleges participate in a regular physical education program. Consequently we note that in 1919 Ypsilanti High School employed Deyo S. LeLand and Katherine Patch as physical education instructors. Prior to this time Ypsilanti High School had limited itself to a boys athletic program which had made quite a good reputation for itself.

In 1928 Bill Foy was named Athletic Director of Ypsilanti High School and in the same year he coached the football team to a 7-1-1 record and a State Class B championship. Individual honors went

to John "Speck" Dignan who was selected as an all-state fullback. Just recently Coach Foy recalled the dedication of the 1928 team. "In my opinion every boy on that team was an all-stater. They only averaged about 140 pounds but they had lots of desire."

In the 1920's and 30's at Ypsilanti High the physical education program was varied. Apparatus work, sports and swimming were included for the men whereas the girls' program consisted of light gymnastics with and without equipment, marching, sports, swimming, folk and aesthetic dancing and hygiene. Mrs. Howard Ivans, Sue Hammock, and Janet McAllister Smith supervised the girls' program. Intramural programs also flourished. Both boys and girls participated in inter-class contests in basketball, baseball, track and field, swimming, and tennis. Mabel Eichkorn was in-



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strumental in starting a Girl's Athletic Club in 1921. Mararet Harker and Eleanor Bowen were among the first officers.

In 1926 an Ypsilanti High organization proposed that a formal award be presented to the winner of an athletic contest between Roosevelt (the school on the hill) and Ypsilanti (the school in the hollow). The proposal was accepted and a purple and grey trimmed jug was designated as the award. Roosevelt was the recipient of the first presentation although Ypsilanti regained the jug at the conclusion of the second contest. This competition was continued for many years when it ceased by virtue of a gentlemen's agreement. Norris Wiltce, former principal of Ypsilanti High School, still remembers the parade activity and the excitement and enthusiasm generated by the competition for the jug.

In 1925 with the completion of a new building, Normal High became Roosevelt High School. Since 1927, boys and girls at Roosevelt have had a varied program of physical education. Heavy apparatus including parallel bars, buck, ropes and bars, boxing, wrestling, swimming and other sports were offered to the boys. The girls program consisted of dance, swimming, hygiene and sports. For many years the physical education program was conducted by Art Walker and Chloe Todd. Art Walker also was the athletic director and a coach. In 1929, an athletic league for class "C" high schools in the area was formed. Roosevelt, along with Lincoln, University High of Ann Arbor, and other schools joined what was to be called the Huron League. In the early 1930's Roosevelt won championships in track and baseball, coached respectively by Howard Chanter and Art Walker. Roosevelt, along with University High, took the greatest number of League Championships in tennis. These teams were coached by Leonard Menzi. During this time, Chloe Todd conducted

physical education classes for the elementary boys and girls of Roosevelt as well as for the high school girls. The highlight of the program was the May Day performance. For years, dances and gymnastic activities culminating in the May Pole Dance were performed by costumed children in the formal gardens behind Sherzer Hall in honor of the Queen and her court.

Lincoln School opened its doors in 1924 and in 1925 Robert Peel was named director of Physical Education for both boys and girls. A physical education program similar to the other two high schools was organized at Lincoln. In 1927, a new director of physical education and athletics was named. Under the new director, Larry Dunning, Lincoln won League championships in track in 1933, 34, 35 and 39. In 1929 the girls' physical education program came under the directorship of Alice Beal. Elementary school children in the city schools had limited physical ed-

cises and vocal numbers. Field days were also popular for the elementary children. From all the city schools, boys and girls met at the city parks and participated in bicycle races, sack races, dashes, baseball throws, and jumping events. This reflection into the past should serve to remind most Ypsilanti residents of their rich and proud heritage as a forerunner in physical education programs.

(Postscript: "What fond memories I had when I found this article, starting with the very impressive castle-like appearance of the building. Upon walking up the massive stairway to the building, you entered a large hallway that was kept immaculate by a matron (Addie). The floors even in the 50's still shone and looked new. I remember being told as a freshman that women were only allowed to enter by the Summit street (south) door and that women were not to enter the North gym which was for men. Of Course I could never forget navi-



Some physical activity classes at the Normal College were devoted to posture correction, precision marching, aesthetic dancing (a forerunner of modern dance) clog and folk dancing, and sports.

ucation programs. For a short time in the 1920's Deyo LeLand was Director of Physical Education in the Ypsilanti Schools. Under his leadership and supervision, classroom teachers were responsible for the physical education program. For a few years, a Spring Festival was held which involved all the elementary school children in the city. Costumed children performed dances, gymnastic exer-

gating the boiler room and squeezing around the hot water pipes in order to enter the swimming pool (11 x 66) which had a ceiling height from the pool deck of approximately 10 feet. I can still see the hole in the ceiling. It was a sad day indeed when the building was demolished for a parking lot. What a tragic end to such a majestic structure." - Claudia Wasik)





## *A Great Lady Is Gone*

We were saddened at the news of the passing of Kathryn Howard while she was visiting family in Alabama, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Kathryn was a dedicated member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society having served in the capacity of both secretary and chair of the Administrative Board. She had been a member of the Board of Directors since 1991.

Kathryn and her husband Lavern acted as consultants in 1971 for the remodeling of the Dow House which became the Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

She had a remarkable ability of remembering many of the people who donated items to the museum. Her recollection of the history of these items was a valuable contribution to the Society. Kathryn's knowledge of glassware, china, linen, and antique furniture was an asset to the museum and will be greatly missed. She had a gift for the placement of furniture and accessories throughout the museum. At Christmas she transformed the mantels and tables into scenes of beauty.

Kathryn's love of art lead to the creation of the museum annual Art Exhibit for local artists.

The memorial for Kathryn was held on March 8, 2014 at the First Presbyterian Church with internment at Oakwood Cemetery in Saline, Michigan.

Kathryn's memory will be cherished as well as the collective knowledge she shared with the community.

# Saturdays at Vic and Mac's

BY FRED THOMAS

The Wuerth Theatre and two soda fountains, Ernie's and Michos Confectionary, were located in the 200 block of Michigan Avenue. Every Saturday these businesses hosted a procession of kids. First there was popcorn at Ernie's. Then came cartoons, a serial, and the feature movie at the Wuerth. Next up was a stop at Michos for ice cream. This routine provided entertainment for youngsters of all ages, and childcare relief for parents whose jobs required them to work many hours per week.



Guys discussing an early rail dragster.



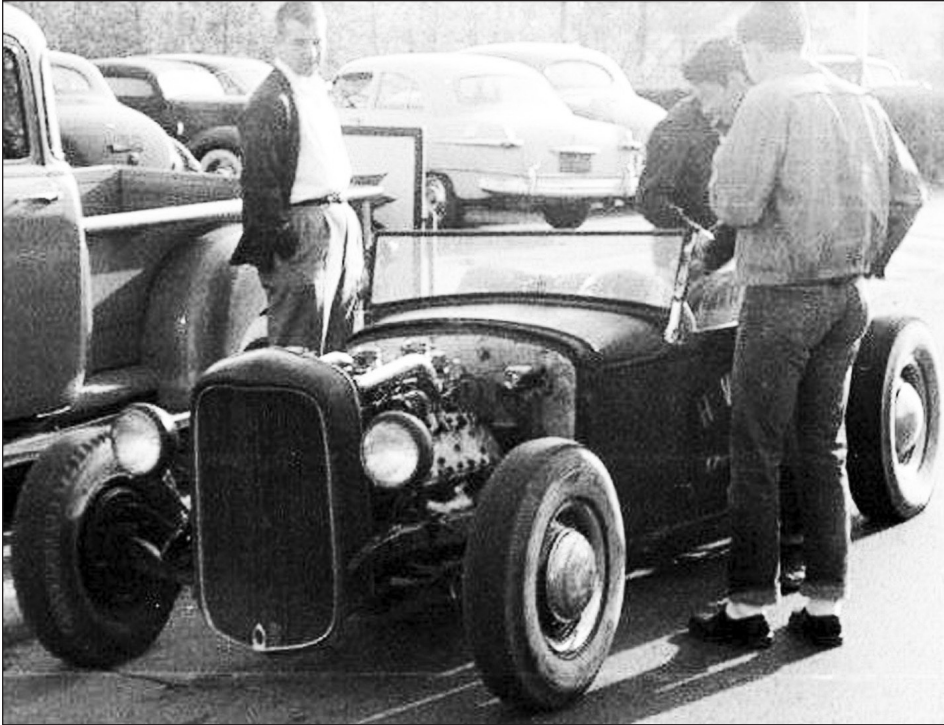
The Flying Red Horse symbol at Vic and Mac's Mobil Service Station.

These weekly, uptown events occupied my junior high buddies and me one whole summer. A car ride to and from town was a treat, but not the norm. Most families had only one automobile. Walking was an accepted mode of transportation for children. Heading west from our East Cross Street home, Ypsilanti was easily reached via two parallel routes. Cross Street led directly into and through town. However, it runs a few blocks north of Michigan Avenue, the city's main street. A.K.A. US 12, the Sauk Trail, and the Chicago Road, this multi-laned highway travels almost three hundred miles from Detroit to Chicago. From my father's car lot at 1189 East Michigan the weekend treks into town were straight shots. The distance from our business to the center of town was two miles. However, it seemed longer on those dog days of summer.

My pals and I preferred the Michigan Avenue choice. Short stops so I could beg movie-and-refreshment money from dad usually preceded our treks. The most direct way was alongside the heavily traveled four-lane roadway. There were no sidewalks until we reached the city limits. Even though traffic speeding by at fifty plus miles per hour threatened physical harm, no adults protested our favored route. Besides, parents didn't seem to worry so much about their kids back then. You were expected to look after yourself.

Halfway to town, a bridge carries traffic over a single railroad track. Miles Street signals the overpass on the east side. On the north side of Michigan, just west of the viaduct, where Michigan Avenue and Ecorse Road intersect, stood Vic and Mac's Mobil Service. By 1950's standards this was an average double service-bay building with a triple-pump island located in front of the office. A Flying Red Horse sign





Youths admiring a channeled 1931 Ford.

beckoned customers. I cannot think of the place without recalling the excitement we felt about it during the 1950s. While growing up around a car lot was a major influence on my interest in automobiles, my experiences around Vic and Mac's left me with an interest in hot rods.

The filling station became our oasis. We calculated it as the midpoint of our journey. Clean restrooms relieved our natural callings. A red Vendo 39 Coca-Cola machine took our nickels and dispensed ice-cold beverages. Six-ounce glass bottles of Coke and small cellophane bags of peanuts provided energy for the up- and downhill walking to and from matinees. We enjoyed looking at cars of different descriptions while eating refreshments.

***The strange looking vehicles parked in and near Vic and Mac's drew our attention.*** Those self-styled automotive creations piqued our interests. Although we were years away from driving legally, we would stand nearby and listen as the older guys discussed car features. The more we learned about them, the more questions we asked. We learned to recognize dual carburetors and high compression heads, even though their functions were yet to be understood. After a while we could talk the talk, a little. The modified machines quickly became a frequent topic of our adoles-

cent conversations. Visits increased. Vic & Mac's became a destination, not simply a chance stopover. Before long our familiarity with this novel automotive genre enabled us to recognize other similarly altered cars when we saw them. Something was happening at this Mobil station, and we wanted to know all about it.

What we were witnessing at Vic and Mac's was the local pioneering spirit of hot rodding, a sport with its origins in California. It was about taking old cars and making them go faster. In addition, they lowered the vehicles by chopping the tops or channeling the bodies down over the frames. Both alterations

apparently decreased wind resistance and made the cars go faster. In the 1950s fast-action drag racing became popular nationally and interest in it spread like wildfire. Young men in Ypsilanti wanted this kind of excitement. As visits at Vic and Mac's racked up, my chums and I impatiently looked forward to the days when we, too, could be a part of this hot rod hysteria.

*(Fred Thomas grew up in the Ypsilanti area, 1948 to 1998, and regularly contributes articles to the Gleanings.)*



A chopped 1936 Ford with a Cadillac motor.



The Smeets Frog is supposedly the only amphibian possessing a fur coat and capable of flight.

# LEGEND OF THE SMEETS FROG

BY JAMES MANN

Sometime during the summer of 1999 a mysterious marker appeared on the tridge, the three way walkway under Cross Street Bridge, documenting the story of the Smeets Frog.

The Smeets Frog, according to the marker, is the only amphibian possessing a fur coat and is capable of flight. It is unusual to hear or see a Smeets Frog, as they only come out at night. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, it may have been the mainstay of the winter diet of Native Americans camping along the Huron River. The Smeets Frog, the marker noted, is found only on the Huron River. Rarely seen, its fur coat becomes covered in moss, making it almost impossible to see. Now a protected species, the hunting of Smeets Frogs is strictly forbidden. The marker, it was duly noted, was from the "Ypsilanti Hysterical Society."

Soon after the appearance of the marker, it was removed by city workers. Not long after this, a second marker appeared, with additional information on the history of research on the Smeets Frog. The new marker stated the Smeets Frog migrated every

year from Riverside Park, to a site on the northern coast of Labrador. This marker was allowed to remain in place for a time. Some questioned the reality of the Smeets Frog, as some said it was some kind of joke. School children visiting Depot Town made inquiries of biologists at several universities, who admitted they had never heard of the Smeets Frog. The biologists even went so far as to suggest the marker was a hoax.

One fifth grade teacher from a north-of-Detroit suburb wrote an acerbic letter to local editors decrying the practice of telling lies to children. Fables of Santa Claus, the Easter

Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy notwithstanding, she was irate and pledged to never again bring her students to Ypsilanti.

Still, the Smeets Frog was the subject of a puppet show at the Dreamland Theater, honored with an ale named for it and displayed on a Tee shirt. Some have even claimed to have heard the strange call of the Smeets Frog late at night.

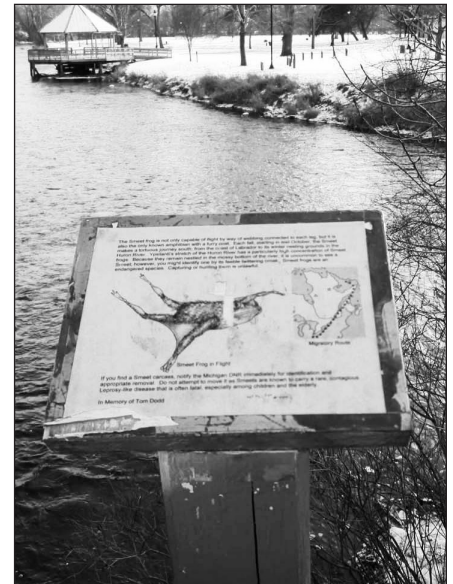
The second marker was not as well made as the first, and in time became moldy and unsightly. It was finally removed, and this time was not replaced until a third marker appeared

near the end of 2010. This marker was in time removed as well. A fourth marker was placed on the tridge in 2013, this time to honor the memory of Tom Dodd.

Still, on summer evenings, when the sun is low and the shadows are long, young couples will walk to the banks of the Huron River to search for the Smeets Frog. These couples are seen holding hands and gazing into each others eyes, as they disappear from sight on their quest. There's something about a good romantic fable that gets people holding hands and gazing blankly at things.



The tridge walkway connects Riverside Park, Frog Island Park and Depot Town.



The Smeets Frog marker can be seen looking south from the tridge.

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*





# John Challis ~ The Musical Maverick Who Revolutionized the Harpsichord

BY JAN ANSCHUETZ

John Challis playing one of his hand-crafted harpsichords.

Like Steve Jobs, who built his first PC in his parents' garage as a teenager and revolutionized computers, a child musical genius in Ypsilanti built an organ in the loft above his father's jewelry store and went on to modernize an ancient instrument – the harpsichord. This is the story of John Challis and the way that the Ypsilanti community - with its many resources including generous citizens, a supportive family, caring instructors, and the support of the Michigan Normal College community - helped an "unusual" child turn into a world-renowned musical master.

John was one of four children born to Charles and Alice Callen Challis of South Lyon, Michigan. Charles studied watch and jewelry making and also mechanical and electrical drawing, and attended college in Illinois. His parents, Charles and Mary Gready Challis, built a large double store on Lake Street in South Lyon in 1900. They sold farm implements and carriages and later automobiles. That year, their son Charles married Alice and established a jewelry business in his parents' building.

The jewelry business was not all that Charles was interested in. He was excited about the newly-invented telephone and in 1902 organized an independent telephone company in South Lyon called The South Lyon Telephone Company. This successful business was sold to The Michigan Bell Telephone Company around 1916. Charles then became partners in his father's business, and when his father retired in 1918 after 47 years, Charles moved his family and talents to Ypsilanti. In 1919 he opened a jewelry store at 104 West Michigan Avenue.

It was then that Charles' twelve year old son John began to blossom. John was being trained as a watch maker and jeweler by his father and learned to use metal working tools. At the same time, his musical abilities were being encouraged by his mother. In an Ypsilanti newspaper article by Flora S. Jones from 1928, she describes how John's mother contacted Professor Frederick Alexander of the Normal

College Conservatory of Music to request that John receive organ lessons from him. She further described how her young son had made his own organ and now needed to learn how to play it. Professor Alexander stated that the child "...had rigged up an old reed organ with pipes, and played with one foot while he pumped with the other. 'But John', I said...'an organist plays with both feet – and shortly afterward he had arranged that very thing, having hitched it up in some way to his mother's vacuum cleaner. True, the vacuum cleaner was about all you could hear – but he played with both feet in approved style."

Not only was John allowed free reign to use his father's



John Challis inserting a leather plectrum on one of the 244 jacks on Challis harpsichord.

metal tools as well as the loft above the jewelry store containing well seasoned boards, Professor Alexander also kindly allowed John to have the keys to the musical studio at the Conservatory, which contained an old style clavichord which was made by master craftsman Arnold Dolmetsch, commissioned by the Chickering Company of Boston. Imagine the amazement of Professor Alexander when one day John told him that he had made his own clavichord. Alexander's response was "But John - you can't make a clavichord"

to which John is said to have replied "I know it - but I have." The 1928 article quotes Alexander as describing this creation. "He had never seemed to consider he would be unable to do the thing he wished to do, and he has always seemed to know how to go about it. In this instance, he had taken apart an old melodeon, a well seasoned old picture back made the sounding board; he had sent away for the finest wire he could obtain and untrained and unskilled except the instinct prompted and he had studied the makings of my instrument - he had made his first clavichord. A bit crude of course, but a vicious achievement for a boy or thereabouts. His hands were trained to fine accuracy, for John's father is a watchmaker and the boy was to follow his father's footsteps."

John was so impressed with the clavichord made by Arnold Dolmetsch which he was allowed to play at the Normal that he wrote to him in England and this is where the community rallied about the talented young Ypsilantian John Challis. When it was established that a place was reserved in the studios of Dolmetsch for his apprenticeship at Haslemere, Surrey, England in 1926, a fund was organized, led by Miss Madge Quigley, a talented graduate of the Normal Conservatory of Music who had studied clavichord at Dolmetsch Studios. The Ypsilanti community soon contributed enough money to pay John's transportation and expenses to learn at the hand of the master craftsman. At that time Dolmetsch was one of a handful of people manufacturing harpsichords in the world.



The Challis harpsichord in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The 19 year old did not waste his time or talent while in England, A small article published in the local Ypsilanti Newspaper dated December 17, 1927 reads "John Challis, Ypsilanti musician who is this year in England, has just had his fourth concert in London with the Dolmetsch family. George Bernard Shaw was in the audience. Miss Madge Quigley who played the clavichord which Mr. Challis made in England, at the Normal Christmas concert here, is under contract with Prof. Frederick Alexander not to play

the instrument in America except under his management. A subscription recital is already under way in Detroit."

When John returned to Ypsilanti for a two month visit with his family and friends, a reporter was sent to interview him. This unusual article, published October 20, 1928 begins: " 'Success?' happily smiled, John Challis, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Challis, Congress St, slender, straight young - boy - almost, except for the black eyes, shinning beneath black brows and wavy hair - fine artist's eyes, ashine (sic) with the joy of following the gleam of inspired genius, and seeing the accomplishment of his handiwork. 'Success, as the world sees it, doesn't mean so much to me -; it is having the chance - and he smiled again, even while his eyes looked away off to Haslemere, England where for two years he has worked in the shops of Arnold Dolmetsch, renowned and world recognized as the master and reviver of old time hand-made musical instruments." (Note - This is an exact quote from the article with strange grammatical usage but it does get the point across).

Returning to England after this visit home, John became foreman and supervised ten craftsmen in the building of harpsichords and clavichords. In 1930 John came back to his father's loft on Michigan Avenue and went into the business of manufacturing harpsichords. According to a Time Magazine article written about John Challis and his harpsichord building, published January 24, 1944, John clarified that the harpsichord was not the predecessor of



the piano and that the ancestor of the piano is the dulcimer. Both the dulcimer and piano use a hammer process to produce notes. The harpsichord's strings are plucked with either quills or leather picks called plectra.

At one time the harpsichord was the instrument of choice for many classical music composers, but was replaced by the piano for concerts in large orchestra halls because harpsichords simply could not be heard by a large audience. In an undated article written by Allen Shoenfield, John Challis stated that he fell in love with the harpsichord. When he played one for the first time he heard how the composers had written their music. He spoke of playing their works on a piano. "It is like putting the masters in straight-jackets." Challis says,

"Bach is usually played like a school-boy recites poetry, in a meaningless singsong."

Challis was soon manufacturing and selling about eight hand crafted harpsichords a year in his studio/workshop on Michigan Avenue where he employed two assistants. Not only did he manufacture instruments, but his goal was to create a harpsichord that would be powerful enough to be heard in concert halls. The Time Magazine article tells us that "He introduced many improvements into harpsichord manufacture, (and) utilized modern materials like Bakelite, aluminum and nylon..." "I am not an antiquarian," he explained, "my idea is simply to carry on the manufacturing of harpsichords where it left off when the instrument went out of pop-

ularity at the end of the 18th century." In 1944, when the article was written, he was the only producer of harpsichords in the world.

One of the ways in which he changed this instrument was by using an aluminum casting for the frame. In an unpublished paper written by the Reverend Jasper Green Pennington of Ypsilanti in 1985, we learn more of Challis genius and inventiveness. "Challis was a highly creative and innovatory builder... The extremes of climate in large areas of North America, as compared with the moderate climatic conditions of Europe in which the harpsichord and clavichord were developed, led him to experiment continually with new materials and techniques of construction in an effort to produce instruments with stability comparable to that of the modern piano... While remaining faithful to a decorative scheme in the tradition of Dolmetsch's later finish and leaf-gilded moldings, he based the interior structure of his instruments increasingly on components of metal and plastic. In his last years he even used metal soundboard, thereby gaining stability in tuning without sacrificing the characteristic Challis tone quality." While greatly changed inside, Challis harpsichords were noted for having a traditional exterior and handmade brass hinges. They stayed in tune through changes in temperature and humidity and had a clear, bright sound.

However, not all musicians approved of his "improvements." One critic wrote that "Challis was another example of what happens when 400 years of refinement through craft is suddenly thrown out, combined with some really counter-productive engineering." She went on to state that "someone had to be John Challis and put the harpsichord through an experimental phase if only to expose the hubris of modern engineering when applied under false goals." Yet, it seems that many musicians valued his hand crafted instruments and his



In 1930 John came back to Ypsilanti and began to manufacture harpsichords in the loft above his father's business at 104 W. Michigan Avenue. Today the space has been combined with 106 W. Michigan Avenue and is occupied by the Ypsilanti Convention and Visitors Bureau.

business grew.

By 1946, Challis's instruments were much sought after and he moved his workshop to larger quarters in Detroit. Challis continued to inspire and teach others the art of harpsichord making. In 1955, 16 year old Frederick Battershell worked Saturdays and Sundays at the Detroit shops. They were first located at 549 East Jefferson and then moved to 85 Vernor. He wrote "I will never forget this experience and the kindness of his partner Ephraim Truesdell." He described a very positive experience which led him to a long life of making instruments using the skills that he learned at the Challis shop.

Another admirer wrote about visiting Challis's Detroit studio on Vernor, near Woodward in the 1960's. He said "John was quite nice to me and demonstrated his dual manual models and then showed off his reinvented Mozart-Hayden pianoforte. I had

*David Worth writes of visiting John Challis "numerous times in NYC and found him to be the most generous individual as well as an exceptional performance coach."*

never heard such sound before or have since. He was constantly smoking and had a bit of a shake at this time, but as soon as he started playing, the shake stopped and he was a magnificent player."

In 1966, when John's house was condemned to build the Chrysler Freeway, he moved his business to New York and located at 133 Fifth Avenue. David Worth writes of visiting John Challis "numerous times in NYC and found him to be the most generous individual as well as an exceptional performance coach." Stephen Danziger, M.D., F.A.A.D., F.A.C.P., Treasurer Brooklyn Chapter, American Guild of Organists wrote in May, 2010 his memories of Challis. "My high school, the High School of Music and Art (now LaGuardia H.S.) in Manhattan had a one manual Challis harpsichord in the music office which I played every day I worked in the office - lunchtime. On one occasion I visited John Challis' studio on



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lower Fifth Avenue and he very kindly showed me what he was working on. His instruments were made with a metal frame, instead of the usual wooden one. He said that it kept in much better tune. Of course the sound of these instruments was much more powerful than a wood-frame instrument. Some compared it with Wanda Landowska's metal-frame Pleyel harpsichord which had strings under great tension, as in the piano... The instruments at Music and Art had pedals instead of hand stops. The appearance of the case when the harpsichord was closed resembled a coffin, and students often commented on what was really inside."

John Challis, a musical genius whose talents were recognized, encouraged and nurtured by the kind people of Ypsilanti, died in New York City at the age of 67 on September 6, 1974. It has been speculated that he had Parkinson disease but a member of the family, a neurologist, who knew

John personally thought that he had died of a liver disorder. In his obituary in a local paper we learn that John had been awarded an honorary Doctor of Humanities Degree by Wayne State University and also an honorary Masters Degree by Eastern Michigan University. He was survived by his 92 year old father, a resident of Lake Alfred, Florida, a sister Hazel Davies in Tampa, Florida, a sister Grace Joardar in Tacoma Park, Maryland and a brother Dean, a retired high school principal living in Dearborn Heights, Michigan. No matter the cause of death, we need to celebrate the life and achievements of this great, talented, imaginative and ambitious young man who left a mark in musical history as Ypsilanti had left it's mark on him.

The University of Michigan Stearns Collection has a Challis harpsichord in their world-renowned collection of musical instruments. Other museums, including The Metropolitan

Museum of Modern Art have Challis harpsichords in their collections. Two videos on You Tube can help you experience the vibrancy of a John Challis harpsichord. The performances are performed by Rosalyn Tureck in 1961 and are J.S. Bach compositions – BWV 848 Prelude and Fugue in C-Sharp (<http://tinyurl.com/k5bzbro>) and BWV 825 Partia-Giga No. 1 in G-flat Major (<http://tinyurl.com/ms3sla4>). Examples of organist E. Power Biggs playing the Challis harpsichord can be found at <http://jsebestyen.org/harpsichord/audio.html#Challis>.

*(Jan Anschuetz is a long-time member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*

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The Mansion was in fact a farm house built in about 1842 for the family of Grove Spencer.

## The Mansion House - A Lost Landmark

BY JAMES MANN

**D**uring the Second World War workers at the bomber plant at Willow Run would leave their homes in Willow Village and travel east on Michigan Avenue past an impressive structure which they came to call “the Mansion house.”

The Mansion was in fact a farm house built in about 1842 for the family of Grove Spencer. The house was in the Greek Revival style, with four pillars at the front. There were four bedrooms in the upstairs and two in the downstairs. The house had nine chimneys and high ceilings, a living room across the front, and an open stairway with a Walnut balustrade. There was a second living room, which could be divided into two rooms with folding doors. The house had a kitchen with a laundry, a breakfast area and a pantry.

The house was private property until the Second World War, when it was used as a government housing center. Then in 1959, the Willow Run School District restored the house for use as administrative offices. By 1967 the Willow Run School District had moved their offices out of the building. That year the house was demolished to make way for a driveway for the newly opened Gar Wood Industries plant.

“Gar Wood, school officials and the Chamber of Commerce

were unsuccessful in efforts to find someone who could maintain the building, which would have had to be moved from the site,” reported The Ypsilanti Press of Friday, March 31, 1967. “It was estimated,” continued the account, “that it would cost about \$16,500 to move the building and at least \$35,000 to put it back in shape for use.” Because of the age of the building, it could only have been moved a short distance, noted the account.

The possibility of using the building as a library was considered by county and township officials, but they found the house unsuitable and the project too expensive. Someone offered to move the house to a nearby site, if the school district would sell the property. The offer was turned down, because the amount offered for the site was too low. In the end, the building was demolished much as it had been built, brick by brick. “The bricks are being removed for resale by Stan’s Wrecking Company of Ypsilanti, who has purchased them from the Detroit wrecking company in charge of the total project,” reported the local paper. Today there is nothing left of the grand old house.

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



# News from the Fletcher-White Archives

BY GERRY PETY

No report about the YHS Archives should begin without mentioning the incredibly cruel weather we have had so far this year in Ypsilanti. The winter of 2013/2014 will long be remembered, so if you have chosen to stay home and away from this place, we don't blame you. As you read this we hope spring is in the air!

This winter has not been wasted in the Archives, as we have been doing some much needed house cleaning of our files, auditing their contents for relevance and order. Every two years or so, this is necessary to keep them up-to-date and orderly. Ms. Melanie Parker, our Graduate Intern from the Historic Preservation Program at Eastern Michigan University, has been working with four dedicated volunteers to scan and upload 2,500 images to our website. Our thanks go out to the volunteers who are committed to this project, with only free coffee as a reward.

Due to our increased Internet presence, we have been able to reach broader audiences. Over the past seven months, we have had 120 visitors from all over the United States visit the Archives. In addition to the on-site visitors, more than 30 requests for information and research have been received via telephone and email.

We appreciate the generosity of our patrons, for without them we would not be able to provide research services for the local and international community. In 2014 we have already received many generous financial donations as well as many donations of artifacts related to the people and places in Ypsilanti and the surrounding communities. Some of the items received were: 1) Film footage of the Ypsilanti High School football team from the 1960s and 1970s; 2) Memorabilia of Jack Hopkins, class of 1963, the first man from Ypsilanti to be killed in Vietnam; and 3) Items from the World War II era, including ration books. These were contributed by Barry LaRue, who found them in a house he acquired in Ypsilanti.

As you can see, we have been quite busy! We hope you will visit us in the YHS Archives as we are willing and able to help you with research on Ypsilanti people, places and happenings.



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# Early Soapmaking

BY LAURA BIEN

*Note: This story originally appeared in the Ann Arbor Chronicle*

In the spring of the year the Washtenaw pioneer farmwife prepared for arguably the smelliest, most dangerous, and most tiring chore of the year. Along the way, she could suffer chemical burns, ruin her clothes, or accidentally start a grease fire.

The process was hours long, involved seemingly endless stirring, and often failed.

Her first step was to gather scraps of skin and fat left over from last fall's butchering and the grease and bones saved from months of cooking. Often rancid and mixed with dirt and animal hair, the fats were combined with water in a big iron kettle outdoors and boiled over a fire. Upon cooling, the congealed floating layer of somewhat cleaner fat was skimmed off and saved.

Along with fats, wood ashes had been conserved for some months. Ashes went into the outdoor wooden ash hopper. The hopper was a large V-shaped trough, a barrel with a hole in the bottom, or even a hollow log set upright. A pad of straw at the bottom of any style of hopper helped retain the ashes. Water poured over the gray powdery mass seeped through to become caustic alkaline lye that trickled out into a collection bucket.

Lye was the wild card in this endeavor; upon its strength depended the success of seat-of-the-skirt pioneer chemistry. Lacking pH test strips or a digital scale, the pioneer woman tested the lye by dropping in an egg or potato - if it floated, the lye was thought to be sufficiently caustic. Another test involved dipping in a feather; if the lye dissolved the feathery bits from the quill, it was dangerous enough to be useful. In an era before rubber gloves or cheap safety goggles, even a small spill or splash could cause severe skin or eye damage, with hospitals, if any, perhaps miles distant.

The fat and lye was put in the kettle and heated and stirred for some hours until the combination thickened into a soft brownish soap, a process called saponification. The process sometimes failed. "Much difficulty is often experienced by those who manufacture their own soap," noted the November 21, 1835 issue of the Rochester, New York-published *Genesee Farmer*. "Often when every precaution has been apparently taken, complete failure has been the consequence; and the time is not long past when some have even declared that they believed their soap was bewitched."

Cooled and packed in stoneware crocks or barrels, the soft soap would serve as the family supply for the coming year. Bar soap could be made by adding salt to the cooking soap, pouring it into wooden trays, allowing it to set, and cutting the hardened slabs into bars. Given the added expense of salt and time, most pioneers opted for soft soap. Its slipperiness led to the figurative use of the term to mean "flattery" as early as 1830, per the *American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*.

Considering soap-making's difficulty, it's small wonder that larger-scale soap manufactories were among the county's first industries. As early as 1843, just two decades after a handful of settlers drifted into Woodruff's Grove, Ypsilanti merchant Charles Stuck was placing ads in the *Ypsilanti Sentinel* requesting ashes and offering soft soap by the gallon or barrel. In 1844, Ypsilanti storekeepers Norris and Follett accepted ashes, barrel staves, firewood, "and other country produce" as the equivalent of cash for items in their store.

In 1855 Andreas Birk, an immigrant from the onetime German Empire's southwestern state of Wuerttemberg, established a soap and candle factory on the corner of Madison and Main streets, piping in water from a nearby spring. By 1881, according to Chapman's *History of Washtenaw County*, the building was two stories tall and measured 30 by 93 feet. In 1880, he had \$1,500 invested in the business, employed four people, and produced \$4,000 worth of product (about \$94,000 in today's dollars).

**NEW GOODS.**  
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 and all kinds of  
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 taken in exchange for goods at cash prices.  
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 Ypsilanti, Jan. 6, 1844.

Ypsilanti merchant Mark Norris, unlike today's Meijer or Target, accepted wood ashes as cash payment.

**ASHES!**  
 RE Considered lawful tender in payment for goods, and all kinds of produce acceptable, good wood and Paper Receipts not be refused by  
**C. STUCK**

Ypsilanti merchant Charles Stuck solicited newspaper readers for ashes.

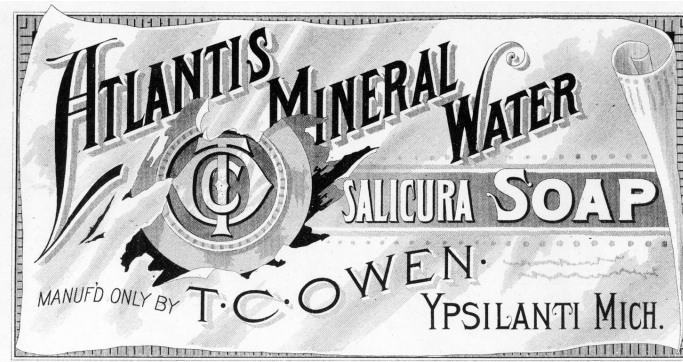


For decades he was one of two Ann Arbor soapmakers, the other being Daniel Millen at the northern end of State Street. In 1880, Millen's soap and candle works represented a \$1,800 investment, employed three men, and produced \$2,480 worth of soap and candles (\$58,000). Birk's factory was eventually named the Peninsular Soap Co., and Millen's the Ann Arbor Soap Works.

In the mid-1880s Ypsilanti would-be water baron Tubal Cain Owen also began manufacturing soap, using his much-touted mineral water. He adorned his hefty bars of Salicura Soap with ornate wrappers.

By the late 1880s, new advertisements portended change. The first ads for Cincinnati-made Ivory and Chicago-made Santa Claus soaps appeared in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti papers. In contrast to plainer local ads whose graphic design consisted largely of varied fonts, the new soap ads looked slick and professional, with elaborate images and in Ivory's case, bubbly doggerel.

One Ivory ad in a September 1889 issue of the Ypsilanti Commercial depicted washerwomen near a clothes-



Ypsilanti mineral water entrepreneur Tubal Cain Owen emphasized that his Salicura soap contained beneficial substances from his miraculous murky water.

line and contained an endorsement by onetime U-M chemistry professor James Langley. He had resigned from the university some months prior. "A direct practical experiment in a laundry has proved to me that the 'IVORY,' tested against a certain well-known brand of laundry soap, has the same amount of cleansing power and one and two-thirds the lasting capacity," wrote the Harvard graduate. "I therefore consider the IVORY a very good laundry soap." Others apparently did as well. By 1897, the Glen V. Mills city directory for Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti listed no local soap manufacturers. A state gazetteer of the same year listed eight soapmakers in Detroit, four in Grand Rapids, and one each in Albion, Bay City, Houghton, Jackson, Portland, and Saginaw.

Michigan continued to contribute to the soap industry, though in an unusual way, as the wreckage left behind by rapacious lumbering became a salable product. The September 1, 1892 issue of the American Soap Journal and Perfume Gazette noted, "[T]he manufacture of [wood ashes] is still carried on . . . [in] the forests of Northern Michigan, and in portions of the Provinces of Canada, this substance is still systematically manufactured the year through. The hardwood stump lands from which the timber trees have been cleared are thus made to contribute a second time to the benefit of the settlers."

Soap was one of the first mass-pro-

duced, nationally-advertised products, along with cigarettes, baking powders, and canned foods. Its success allowed such manufacturers as Colgate-Palmolive, the British Lever Brothers (later Unilever) and Ivory manufacturer Procter and Gamble to be early and prominent sponsors of the 1930s radio dramas called "washboard weepers" or "soap operas."

Modern-day craft soapmaking can be a dramatic production as well. Even given such conveniences as mail-order food-grade lye of a known concentration, cheap-ish Costco canola and olive oil, and library books with time-tested recipes, the aspiring soapmaker must assemble quite a suite of ladles, scrapers, bowls, molds, oils, safety equipment, measuring cups, colorants, essential oils for fragrance, Solo cups for color-mixing, old towels, candy thermometers, a digital scale, a non-aluminum stock pot, a stick blender, a giant tub to keep it all in, and a tolerant spouse. Many items can be gleaned from dollar or thrift stores - bravery concerning the lye must be summoned from within.

The end result in the author's fumbling foray was a barely-solid slab with a hue less leafy freshness than a moldy pallor. The scented slab, due to a slight measuring error, reeks with a lilac gut-punch that almost makes the eyes water. The eyes of pioneer foremothers, were they to see this saggy soap, would likely water as well, with laughter. No fancified folderol was needed for the resourceful local ladies whose determination transformed moldy bacon and a handful of ashes into a squeaky-clean home, wardrobe, and family.

*(Laura Bien is a local author and historian and a volunteer in the YHS Archives.)*



From U of M's elite ivory tower, an ardent Ivory Soap Booster.



Susanne Stinson was recruited for a position as a master teacher in the newly expanded laboratory school, Roosevelt, at Michigan State Normal College in the 1920s.

*Although many years  
have gone by,  
there are people who still  
remember Susanne Stinson.  
That is another  
characteristic of characters,  
they are memorable.*

# Characters

BY PEG PORTER

Every family has one. Every organization has one or more as does every community. Who are these characters? They are individuals known not by what they do, where they live, gender, or any other of the ways we identify an individual. They are uniquely themselves, sometimes following the beat of a different drummer. Mention their name and you will see a smile or maybe hear a chuckle. A typical response might be, “Oh, I know him/her. He/she is quite a character.”

College or university communities harbor more than their share of characters. Typically, institutions of higher education have a greater tolerance for individuals who are “out of the ordinary.” In fact, these characteristics may be highly valued and even encouraged. So it was for Susanne Stinson (also known as Susan) who was recruited for a position as a master teacher in the newly expanded laboratory school, Roosevelt, at Michigan State Normal College in the 1920s.

The laboratory school was to be staffed by “Master Teachers,” who held advanced degrees and had MSNC faculty status. Susanne Stinson, a native of Maine, held both a bachelors and masters degrees from Columbia Teachers College. She began her career at MSNC as an eighth grade English teacher. As a Master Teacher she supervised student teachers. The Master, or critic teacher, was also expected to stay informed on advances in education. She attended the University of Chicago, a leader in the development of techniques and practices to enhance student learning. John Dewey, the foremost expert of his day in education, started the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. The school continues to this day.

Susanne was born on October 26, 1880 in Hancock, Maine. Her father, Philip Stinson, was a farmer. It seems likely that her given name was Susan. She is listed in the 1900 Federal Census as “Susie” Stinson, living at home, and teaching school. By the time she moved to Ypsilanti in the mid-1920s she was known either as Susan or Susanne. She adopted the name “Susanne” and used that as her first name for the rest of her life.

Susanne was tall, very tall for women of her generation. She did not “walk,” she strode. She held her head high and used her height to her advantage. Her voice was what is sometimes called “flutey.” That is, she did not speak at the same pitch all the time but her voice



rose and fell depending on the situation. Susanne commanded attention. Since she spent much of her career teaching eighth graders, this ability was useful.

She was outspoken. One day she met Eleanor Meston, a first grade teacher, in a Roosevelt hallway. Susanne was nearly ten inches taller than the diminutive Miss Meston. Eleanor said she had just taken one of her boys to the School Nurse's office as she thought he had a temperature. "Eleanor," Susanne boomed out, "we all have temperatures. That young man has a fevah!"

Eleanor took delight in telling that story in later years. It captured the essence of Susanne. There were other stories about Susanne. Judy Morey remembers a cartoon her father drew of Susanne bending over a drinking fountain. The caption: "Water does run uphill!"

I knew about Susanne Stinson before I met her. One day, my mother was driving north on Huron Street. Up ahead she saw Miss Stinson striding down the street toward campus. Unfortunately Susanne had a wardrobe malfunction of which she was unaware. The back of her skirt was caught in her undergarments. When mother later described that incident she nearly collapsed laughing. She said, "There were her long legs out in the open. I did not know whether to stop and tell her or just keep driving." She did the latter. I expect that when Susanne discovered the problem, she just pulled her skirt down without breaking stride.

Susanne was the faculty adviser to Tri Sigma Sorority. I pledged Tri Sigma as did my mother before me. At the close of the school year, the sorority

had a formal meeting during which new officers were installed and the Susanne Stinson Scholarship awarded. We all wore white. Miss Stinson came to the meeting at the end of my junior year. She had on a cream colored suit and white tie blouse. I was installed as the chapter president and also awarded the Susanne Stinson scholarship. At the close of the meeting I walked over to her and said how honored I felt to receive the scholarship. She looked down at me. I noticed she had a dab of rouge on each cheek and pink lipstick inexpertly applied. This was clearly an occasion for Miss Stinson. Her reply, "Yes dear, I know both of your parents."

I decided the best course of action on my part was simply to smile and nod my head, for I was sure my father was her student in eighth grade. Dad was never very interested in school work. He was known for his quick wit even at that young age. For while he probably was never disruptive, her memory of him was doubtless not as an eager student. She knew my mother beginning with sorority days. But all I could think of was the Huron Street incident.

Not too many years later, Susanne returned to Maine where she passed away in the early 1970's. Although many years have gone by, there are people who still remember Susanne Stinson. That is another characteristic of characters, they are memorable.

*(Peg Porter is Assistant Editor of the Gleanings and a regular contributor of articles.)*

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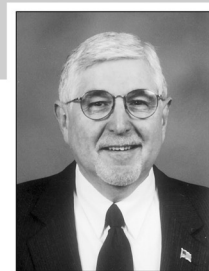


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# The Soldiers' Monument at Highland Cemetery

BY JAMES MANN

Standing at the south end of Highland Cemetery, near the bluff that overlooks the city, is the monument dedicated to honor the memory of those who died in the American Civil War defending the Union. The monument is twenty-two feet three and a half inches tall, at the top of which is the figure of a Union soldier holding a flag. The monument is made from blue Westerly Granite, and is carved from solid rock.

The idea of honoring the memory of those who had died in service during the Civil War first came to light in about 1891, and \$50 was contributed. There was some talk of building a Memorial Hall, but nothing more came of the idea at that time. The suggestion was made to use the money for some other noble purpose.

Florence Babbitt was placed in the executive chair of the Woman's Relief Corps in January of 1893, and she was very interested in the perpetuation of the memory of those who had fallen. Mrs. Babbitt consulted with Mrs. Mary Ann Starkweather, who asked, "Why don't you build a monument?"

The work to secure the needed funds was started on March 19, 1893. The women of the Corps worked for several years to raise the funds for the monument. The members of the Corps canvassed the city to solicit contributions. After a good start, the effort slowed and seemed to come to an end. The nation had fallen into a depression, a tornado had swept a path of ruin through the city, and in May of 1894 the high school building was destroyed by a fire. By the time of the high school fire, the committee had raised only \$350. All this had caused a sense of discouragement to set in. A prominent businessman sent a question to the committee: "This al-

ways going to erect a monument to the memory of some ones, and never doing it, is what might be called a monumental farce."

Mary Ann Starkweather informed the committee overseeing the effort that she would give \$1,000 if the Woman's Relief Corps first raised the same amount in six months. Six months later, to the day, Mary Ann Starkweather made good on her promise, and gave \$1,000 as the ladies of the Corps had fulfilled their end of the bargain.

None of the designs that would cost \$2,000 were satisfactory to Mary Ann Starkweather or the committee. The decision was made to secure a monument at a cost of \$3,000. Mary Ann Starkweather pledged she would assist in securing the needed funds.

The monument was dedicated on Memorial Day, May 30, 1895, beginning with a procession from the city. Mrs. Babbitt read a history of the monument, then pulled a string and unveiled the figure. "Then the bands struck up a lively strain and a salute was fired right royally. The Woman's Relief Corps marched around the base of the monument and covered it with flowers. The chosen flower of this Corps is the Michigan rose, and we fully agree with the ladies that they could not have chosen any flower more beautiful or fragrant," reported *The Washtenaw Evening Times* of Friday, May 31, 1895.

Every year since then, on Memorial Day, a ceremony is held at the monument to honor those who died in defense of the nation.

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



The American Civil War monument was dedicated on Memorial Day, May 30, 1895,



# Chicago Road Marker

BY JAMES MANN

Every day hundreds of drivers pass the junction of Michigan Avenue and Congress Street unaware of the historical marker at the site. At the point of the junction is a large boulder placed there to commemorate the Chicago Road, a pathway through the wilderness, constructed in the early 1830's, to connect Detroit and Chicago.

"The marker is in the form of a 2 ½ ton boulder of black syenite granite, and was procured with much difficulty a few miles west of Ann Arbor," reported The Daily Ypsilanti Press of Friday, July 3, 1914. "According to Golz and Basom, who supplied it, there are only two other pieces of this variety anywhere near here and these cost from nine to fifteen hundred dollars apiece. The Black Syenite, declares Mr. Basom, is the hardest of all granite, and is rare," noted the account.

The marker was dedicated on the 4th of July, 1914, with music by a band and an address by Professor. R. Clyde Ford, of the Michigan State Normal College, now Eastern Michigan University. The text of the address was published by The Daily Ypsilanti Press on Wednesday, July 8, 1914. "A road is a sign of civilization," said Prof Ford. "The greatest nation of antiquity - Rome - left no greater and surer proof of her right to supremacy over other nations than in her mighty

roads which she built over hill and dale, mountain, river, and plain to tie her conquered provinces together and to herself, and along those roads then, and later, traveled the culture and commerce of the world. It has been well said that every road is the story of a great need, and nothing shows the truth of the statement more than the way our own American civilization has drifted necessitously and everlastingly along certain great roads of the continent. And like our civilization our roads are inheritances - the modern form of ancient purpose."

As part of his address, Prof. Ford gave a history of the Chicago Road to explain its purpose to connect Detroit with Chicago and to open the wilderness of the northwest to settlement. "As a people," concluded Professor Ford, "we are no longer poor, struggling to wrest a scanty livelihood from the wilderness - we are now a people of wealth, with an income tax, with handsome churches, schoolhouses, colleges, hospitals and penitentiaries as very visible signs of our advancement in civilization. The planting of such a monument as the one before which we have gathered today is a significant event for as a community, it shows that we have not forgotten the pioneers of our history, the men and women who blaze the way into our forests and opened up the land to culture and progress. Such a boulder is a lasting record, but no more so than the work done by the hardy frontiersmen of that early day. May we and our children look upon this stone and then upon the highway - the old Detroit and Chicago Road - and not forget that we stand in a thoroughfare along which have traveled a mighty part of the civilization of early Michigan."

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



The Chicago Road Marker is located at the junction of Michigan Avenue and Congress Street.

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# Case of the Missing Ring

BY JAMES MANN

On a pleasant summer evening in 1922, a young couple was saying good-night. Each must have enjoyed the company of the other, as they made a date for the following Saturday evening. Still, there may have been a note of doubt in the air. "I'm afraid you're fooling," said George Slanke to Annabelle Morton. "Let me wear your ring until I come, as security." As she then intended to keep the date, Annabelle let him remove the prized ruby from her finger.

However, Annabelle failed to keep the date, as her "best fellow" came to Ypsilanti that day, and claimed for himself all of her time for the day. Afterward she wrote to George and explained what had happened, but as he did not reply, she wrote again. Annabelle even made two trips to his home in Inkster, but he was not at home each time she arrived. What is a girl to do? Why retain a lawyer, of course.

Annabelle asked Martin Stadtmiller to get her ring back and he obtained a civil warrant from Justice of the Peace D. Z. Curtiss. Then Ypsilanti Police Officer Schnepf found George Slanke at his place of employment, the Ford Rouge plant. "Slanke was driving his own car, so the officer placed him in front and they drove tandem to Ypsilanti last evening where Slanke, wearing his fur collared overcoat with his long hair tossed back...denied that he ever had the ring or knew anything about it, while Annabelle, with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks declared he was not telling the truth, the whole truth or anything like the truth," reported The Daily Ypsi-

lanti Press of Friday, February 23, 1923.

Justice Curtiss set the case for the following Tuesday, February 27, 1923. "Your bail will be \$100 for your appearance on that occasion," pronounced Justice Curtiss. Slanke could not furnish the bond, so Justice Curtiss ordered his car held as security. "I understand," replied Slanke. "Will you lend me 35 cents to get back to Inkster?" To this request, the Judge Curtiss agreed.

"This security matter case," added Curtiss, "depends somewhat on whether you were duly authorized by law to take security."

The following Tuesday George returned to Ypsilanti and tried to prove he was not the man Annabelle had given the ring to. He told the court that she was in the back seat of his car with Otto Capp, while he was driving. Annabelle told the court that it was George she had given the ring to and never saw it again. "Why should Annabelle chase you all over the country, and ask a lawyer to write to you, if she gave her ring to another fellow?" asked Justice Curtiss. As George was unable to answer the question, Justice Curtiss fined him \$35 and costs. The total was \$52.65.

George was not happy with the conclusion of the case, and Curtiss had to make it clear to him the decision was final. "As George doesn't draw his bi-monthly income from Henry Ford until a week from Friday, he was given until that date in which to pay up, and in the meantime his car is held in a garage here as security," noted The Daily Ypsilanti Press of Wednesday, February 28, 1923.

"Why not trade the car for the ring," suggested Curtiss. "I should say not! I'll buy her a new ring right away for I can get it on the installment plan, if you'll let me have my car," responded George. "I'll take her to Detroit and let her pick it out." Martin Stadtmiller, attorney for Annabelle, told the court his client had no intention of going on another date with George, and had no interest in going into the jewelry business either. So George had to do without his car, until he was able to pay the fine and costs. By the way, George did pay back the 35 cents loaned him by Justice Curtiss.

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*





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# Museum Board Report

BY NANCY WHEELER, INTERIM CHAIR

**T**he Ypsilanti Historical Museum lost a great benefactor with the death of Kathryn Howard. Read about her legacy on page 11 in this issue.

Thanks to six of our members and only \$100, we have new lace curtains in the parlors and on the front door. The old curtains were remade for the bedroom and upper hall. Seamstresses were Virginia Davis-Brown, Rita Sprague, Nancy Wheeler, and Daneen Zureich. Bill and Karen Nickles manned the tape measure and ladders.

New exhibits include Daneen Zureich's Fenton Rabbits, Shelton Clifton's Mosser Glass from Cambridge Ohio, Cathie McClures' Century Collection of Miss Ginny Dolls, a new Craft Room display, and others in the planning stage. We have large and small exhibit areas if you have a collection we could borrow for a month or two. Call **734-482-4990**.

Save May 10, 2014 from 2:00 to 4:00p.m. for "HIGH TEA at the Museum," hat and gloves optional. It will feature entertainment and lots of goodies. Tickets will be \$5.00 and can be reserved by calling **734-484-0080**. The deadline for reservations is May 1, 2014.

The Best of Lost Ypsilanti display will be July 1 thru September 1. More information about these displays will be published in the next issue.

Welcome to new Docents Allison Savoy, Lana Hull, and Stacia Suckstorff. If you have an extra three hours once a month, especially on the week-ends, we always need Docents. Training is provided and you will not be guiding alone. Call **734-482-4990** and volunteer.

*(Nancy Wheeler is the Interim Chairperson of the Museum Advisory Board.)*

*Save Saturday, May 10, 2014*

*2:00 to 4:00p.m. for High Tea at the Museum*





# Students Saved from Jail by College Officials

BY JAMES MANN

Justice Martin Stadtmiller was clearly in a bad mood, on the morning of Friday, June 15, 1923. Before him were two young women, students at the Michigan State Normal College, now Eastern Michigan University, accused of stealing flowers from a city park.

“Sentiment on the part of visitors in the justice’s room was in favor of the policeman and against the girls...The parks, they argued, must be protected. If everyone is allowed to pick freely from the flower beds, there will soon be no flowers left in the parks. The city has to pay for those flowers, and a city ordinance forbids picking flowers from park beds, the fine not to exceed \$50,” reported The Daily Ypsilanti Press of Friday, June 15, 1923. Those who were in the room supported the officer, adding, that girls who steal flowers from a public park, are not fit to teach school.

The anger of Justice Stadtmiller was not directed at the two girls, however, but at another case altogether. That morning three young men, also students at the Normal College, were released from the city jail. The three had been arrested for stealing from the Huron Hotel ten bed sheets, ten pillow cases, a dozen bath towels, a box of soap, cigars and silverware. The missing items were found during a search of their rooms. The items were marked, so there was no mistake. The three young men were arrested, held overnight in the city jail, and released in the morning at the request of college officials.

“Of course,” said Justice Stadtmiller, “if you want to sign a complaint against them, I’ll fine them, but it makes my blood boil to see three able-bodied men released from justice when they have stolen valuable merchandise and admit that they have stolen it and then be asked to fine two girls for picking a few posies.”

“If this case hadn’t come up today, I might be inclined to feel less lenient towards the girls. Of course, it is your duty as park officer to protect the park gardens, and mine as justice of the peace to inflict punishment on those who break the law, but I’d like to mete out punishment where punishment is due.”

Officials at the Normal College asked that they be allowed to deal with the case of the young men. However, Charles Pullen, the manager of the Huron Hotel, left police headquarters without signing a complaint against the young men. Justice Stadtmiller could not act against the young men, unless a complaint was signed.

“If these young men were just ordinary bums, I would be urged to punish them to the limit. It would be Jackson for them. Because they are Normal students, educated, with the advantages of a home and college training and thereby

all the more able to realize the seriousness of their offense and differentiate between right and wrong, I am urged to say nothing,” said Stadtmiller. “I think,” continued Stadtmiller, “it is a mistake to punish men who are perhaps the victims of circumstances, untaught as to property rights and to let those go who have had better training, are equally guilty in the eyes of the law, and therefore morally the more responsible. I cannot see wherein the Normal College is a law unto itself.”

All of the stolen property was returned to the hotel, and no complaint was signed.

“If I had been sure the boys would have been given a fine,” said Charles Pullen, the manager of the Huron Hotel, “I might have signed the complaint, but I did not feel it would do them any good to spend the next month or so in jail. With the assistance of the Chief of Police all of the missing property has been recovered and I think the boys have learned their lesson. In fact, I am so firmly convinced that they will never do such a thing again, that one is being taken back as an employee of The Huron. The other two were going home at the close of the school year anyway.”

*The three had been arrested for stealing from the Huron Hotel ten bed sheets, ten pillow cases, a dozen bath towels, a box of soap, cigars and silverware.*

Normal College Registrar C. P. Steimle told The Daily Ypsilanti Press of Saturday, June 16, 1923, the three boys would be punished by the College, might even face the possibility of expulsion.

“The Normal College,” said Steimle, “feels that it can deal satisfactorily with cases of stealing on the campus and has endeavored to handle such cases themselves. This situation is admittedly different. Although the hotel management has dropped the case against the boys, I feel certain that President McKenny will not consider it lightly.”

None of the newspaper accounts indicated if Justice Stadtmiller took any action against the girls for picking flowers but his comments, as reported in the newspaper accounts, seem to indicate that he let them off without any punishment.

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a regular volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*

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